

# CHAPTER 1

## In the halls of power

Jacob nodded to the security guard walking down the hallway as he passed him in the other direction. His office was inconveniently located a long walk from the where the showers were to be found in the less fashionable section of Parliament house. Passing security was almost guaranteed. The guard discreetly scanned the small identification tag attached to the lapel of Jacobs's suit jacket. Obviously nothing was astray with the scan as the guard merely nodded politely and continued walking.

Although riding his bicycle to work was not only an efficient and fashionable mode of transport it was annoying that he had a long walk to his office. As he enter the office he saw his personal assistant Sarah sat at her desk, "Morning Mr Hass, another slow ride in?" she said with a teasing smile.

Jacob grimaced, Sarah also rode a bicycle to work but being 20 years younger, slim and fit she often would pass Jacob on the ride. "One day you will buy a decent bike and then you won't get passed all the time." She said. Jacob smiled at the ongoing debate they had been having for the past six months over which were the better bikes to ride. He also smiled at the irony of the statement.

Sarah grabbed her laptop and followed Jacob into his office proper. Jacob sat at his desk and silently thanked fate for arranging him such an excellent personal assistant as he saw the hot cup of coffee on his desk as well as his computer turned on and the morning schedule papers

laid out ready. He smiled at Sarah and said, "You know that you go beyond your job description with all this. I really do appreciate it, it makes working for a living a little less horrid. I really must get my assistant to arrange an end of year bonus for you."

Sarah laughed, fetching him coffee and getting things sorted of a morning and all the other extras were worth it to ensure she maintained her position as assistant to her boss. Other assistants had awful bosses who treated their assistants like indentured servants. Jacob treated her like a partner in the role he played. Also the bicycle she rode to work and usually beat him to work on was the bonus he gave her last Christmas. She had gone from riding a rusted old hand me down bike her ex-boyfriend had owned to a top of the line Mountain bike worth about 7 weeks of her wage. She knew that her friend down the hall had gotten a bunch of flowers from her boss and he earned an awful lot more than Jacob did.

"Is Ally back from Uni?" Sarah asked Jacob making small talk as he took a sip of his coffee. Jacob replied, yep, she's back and laying around the house doing nothing and apparently loving it."

"I don't blame her" Sarah said, "those midterm exams are monsters, I doubt she has gotten much sleep or decent food over the last two weeks."

"It's been so long since I went to university I don't remember exams, I probably have blocked them from my memory" Jacob replied laughing.

"Well enough banter" Sarah said in her no nonsense personal assistant voice, "Let's get your weeks schedule sorted, the new tax initiative is being launched next week and you need to smooth some problems from the unions and the business lobby if we are going to get through without the media losing their collective minds".

The pair settled down to the task but had only been working for a few minutes when a quiet electronic warble began to echo throughout the office.

"What the..." Sarah began before she suddenly realised what the sound meant. Jacob watched as Sarah's face went from its usual healthy tan to a much lighter shade of white. Jacob's phone began to ring and he answered it. Ever since the attack on Parliament house 2 years prior the alarm has only ever been heard during the six monthly drill. Sarah as one of the personal assistants to a sub head of department would have been informed of an impending drill.

Sarah strained to hear the person on the other end of the line but took the serious and slightly nauseous look on her boss's face as an indication that something was wrong, very wrong. Jacob put the phone down

Jacob looked at Sarah with an expression she had never seen before. She went from worried to very afraid when she realised the expression was fear. She felt the pit of her stomach drop at the realisation that something was not only amiss but it was something really bad when Jacob Hass the master of the neutral facial expression showed fear.

Jacob quickly regained his neutral expression and in his all business voice said, "Alright Sarah, something has gone very wrong in the world, I need you to get the satellite phone and ring Ally. I want you to tell her to do the following." Jacob paused as Sarah grabbed her note pad and began writing down the instructions.

"Tell her to get the keys for the AUDI and to grab food from the pantry and load it in the car. Also tell her in the garage on the top shelf above the camping gear are two cardboard boxes about a meter long, half a metre wide and deep. Tell her to pack them in the car. Oh and grab the camping gear on the shelf underneath them." The important part is tell her to do it within 10 minutes, it doesn't have to be neat just get it in the car then drive as fast as she can out of there."

Sarah controlled her nerves but only just as she took notes that involved telling her boss's daughter to evacuate as if there were a nuclear war about to land. 'Be professional girl' she silently told herself, 'keep it together, panic will ruin us if you don't'.

Jacob stood up and began pacing the floor for a few moments before he stopped, "Tell her to drive straight to Mount Stromlo Observatory"

Sarah looked at her boss and asked, "Why there?"

"Because there is nothing there and it's up high, she will be able to get an idea of the lay of the land. She has to get out of Canberra and she has to get out of the state, she needs to find somewhere without people"

"Once you have done that tell me and then if you have anyone you love in Canberra, tell them to get out, get out now."

With that pronouncement Sarah ran to her desk and pulled the satellite phone from its charger cradle and made the call. She was surprised that Ally just listened and didn't ask any questions or seem to be freaking out the same way she was inside. At the end of the call Ally merely told Sarah to tell her dad she loved him and would see him later.

Returning to the main office Sarah advised Jacob of the call made and Ally's message. Jacob's neutral expression didn't waver. It was then that Sarah noticed that the schedule papers had been pushed aside on the desk and on it now lay a set of keys a slim folder. Next to that was one thing she never expected to see, an open plastic weather proof case containing a hand

gun.

Although it seemed like an hour had passed Sarah could see on the clock above the now open safe in the corner of the office that only 2 minutes had passed. Outside she could hear people. They were running around and there was an edge of panic in their voices. She wished that the office had a window she could look out of to see what might be happening on the cold winter's morning. She just thought, *'if I could see the sun maybe it wouldn't seem so bleak'*.

"Mr Hass?" she said, "What's going on? Why did I just tell your daughter to evacuate the city?"

Jacob looked at the young woman before him as he removed the gun and holster from the case and attached it to his belt. As he smoothed his suit jacket over the new bulge on his hip he thought of how Sarah was only a year or two older than his own daughter he had just broken a number of laws to warn and hopefully save.

"Did you call anyone of your own?" he asked.

"No Sir" she replied, "There really isn't anyone to call since I became single and mom and dad passed away last year."

"Ok, let's go then", Jacob said as he began walking from the room with the keys and folder in hand. Sarah followed as she had many times before on their way to meetings and events. This time however the halls they walked through were not the library quiet she was used to. People walked quickly, almost jogging and the faces were no longer the cold hard uncaring she was used to. Now they were afraid.

"Is it war Mr Hass" Sarah whispered as they approached the auditorium. Jacob shook his head for Sarah to be quiet as they entered the auditorium which was filled with people. A sea of suits with a predominantly black theme. A smattering of the starched white security guards uniforms stood out starkly against the professional attire of the room.

On the podium stood the Prime Minister, no sooner than they had entered the room he began to speak into the microphone. There was no expression in his voice or face as he said the words which caused Sarah, usually cool calm and collected to feel her bladder slightly loosen and a tiny bit of urine escape.

The Prime Minister said, "As of 7 am this morning there has been a number of terrorist attacks of a biological nature. Reports are coming in from everywhere in the world of some form of biological agent which affects people causing them to become extremely violent and attack people without cause or provocation."

“We do not know what the agent is, how it is delivered or how it is spread. I have enacted the emergency protocols. I have ordered the house security force to undertake full defensive measures of this facility and all persons who have been issued with firearms under the terrorism defence act are to report to security for assignment in defence of the facility. All phone lines out of the facility have been shut down to prevent people spreading panic and interfering with the proper response to this situation.

If you are not assigned a weapon under the terrorism defence act you are to report to the commissary for assignment in support roles. That is all.”

The room erupted into shouted questions as the Prime Minister completed his statement, turned without a further word or acknowledgement and left by the side door. As soon as he had left two white shirted security guards took up position preventing anyone from following.